



Migration and Mission: A Study of Philip's ministry in Samaria (Acts 8)

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.47814/ijssrr.v7i2.1954>

Abstract

The Christian church exists to fulfill the Great Commission of making disciples of all nations (Matt. 28:19-20 and its parallels). The inauguration of the church on the day of Pentecost and the empowerment of the disciples through the infilling of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1-6) equipped the church for a worldwide mission. The book of the Acts of the Apostles recounts incidents of persecution that drove the disciples out of Jerusalem to live in other places as refugees and missionaries. In the contemporary Ghanaian context where migration is a common phenomenon, the church can learn from the missional consequences of the migration of the early Christians. Yet, not much scholarly attention has been given to this subject, especially from an African perspective. This research, therefore, examined the correlation between migration and Spirit-empowered mission based on Philip's ministry in Samaria recorded in Acts 8. The paper is a non-empirical study that gathered data from journal articles, books, Bible commentaries and dissertations/thesis. The methodology comprised an examination of historical and literary contexts of the text; literary analysis, lexicology (the meaning of words), morphology (the form of words), grammatical function of words (parts of speech), syntax (the relationships of words) and figures of speech. The main argument is that Christianity is a migratory religion and therefore, believing migrants should consider their situation as an opportunity to fulfill the Great Commission. The paper contributes to New Testament scholarship and mission studies.

Keywords: *African; Judea; Migration; Mission; Philip; Samaria*

Introduction

Jesus, in his last words to his followers, commanded them to embark on a global disciple-making assignment (Matt. 28:19-20). This assignment, commonly referred to as the Great Commission, also includes baptism and teaching. The fulfillment of the Great Commission requires Jesus' followers to

move from one locality to another; hence migration and missions become “bedfellows” (Mpereh 2021, p. 206). The word “migration” refers to the movement of individuals from one place to another (Aidoo 2021). For Tataru (2019, p.13) migration is “the mass movement of some tribes or populations from one territory to another, determined by economic, social, political or natural factors.” In this case, the individuals who make the movements to other foreign lands are referred to as migrants.

Buchholz (2021) suggests that migration is a regular component of human history and as such, a section of Christian scholars is of the opinion that migration is either motivated by God directing some of his devotees to settle in a foreign land for missions or situations (like wars and persecution) forcing people to be displaced. In the Hebrew Bible migration is often motivated by natural disasters and divine retribution (Stenschke 2016). The driving of Adam and Eve out of the garden of Eden, from the presence of God (Gen 3:23f) due to disobedience, Cain “condemned to be a fugitive for murdering his brother” (Gen 4:12), humanity scattered in all directions of the earth because the people were embarking on what was contrary to the will of God (Gen 11:8ff) and finally the people of Israel who were sent to exile in Assyria as a result of incessant indulgence in sin (2 Kings 17: 22-23) are examples of migration caused by divine retribution (Stenschke 2016, p.130). The migration of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob to Egypt, and Abimelech and his family to Moab were caused by famine. Whether necessitated by famine or for divine retributions, these migrations had both negative and positive consequences on the people in the sense that the people were impoverished at a point, they were deprived of their status of nationality but some of them became wealthy in foreign lands (Stenschke 2016).

Migration accounts are not limited to the Old Testament; they also appear in the New Testament. Jesus himself was an itinerant preacher and so did not live permanently at one place (cf. Luke 9: 58). Some of Jesus’ disciples deliberately relinquished their families, homes and careers in order to respond to their master’s invitation to discipleship (Stenschke 2016, p.131). Migration is recognized in the New Testament narratives as an encouraging phenomenon in the quest of spreading Christianity in general and the mission of sharing the gospel of Christ across diverse cultures in the ancient Graeco-Roman world (Kahl 2022). According to Buchholz (2021), Jerusalem and Judea, where Christianity was believed to have originated, had multiple races and cultures and as such migration became a routine mechanism to reach out to that world at that time. In the early church, missionary activities were closely related to migration, either voluntarily or by force. The book of Acts gives accounts of people who left their places of origin to new places, under the influence of the Holy Spirit and for the sake of the Gospel (Kpobi 2021, p.42). Without migration, the Christian faith would have remained in Jerusalem, having no meaningful effect on the other parts of the world.

Of interest to the present study is the account of the migration of Philip from Jerusalem to Samaria and the resulting missionary activities (Acts 8:1-13) that even prompted the attention of the Jerusalem church to send Peter and John to visit Samaria for confirmation of the news about Philip’s ministry (vv. 14-25). The paper conducted an exegetical analysis of Acts 8:1-13 to bring out lessons for contemporary migrants and missionaries. To put the study in the right perspective, the next section outlines the background of the book of Acts (8:1-13).

Historical Background of Acts 8:1-13

The title of the book, Acts of Apostles or simply Acts, did not originate from the author but was later ascribed to it by church historians because of its historical content related to the activities (“acts”) of the apostles (Mensah 2018). Even though the book does not name its author, it was attributed to Luke by early church tradition and this view is generally accepted (Gundry 2003). According to Gundry, Lukan authorship is authenticated by similar dedication to Theophilus, common use of medical terminologies comparable to a physician and the use of similar vocabulary and style as in the Gospel according to Luke.

The book has been deliberately placed in between the gospels and the epistles to serve as a liaison between the gospels and the epistles (Guthrie 1990). Hence Acts provides a background or a context for reading the epistles.

The Literary Context of Acts 8:1-13

After Jesus' ascension, Jesus' disciples (who were migrants from Galilee), settled in Jerusalem in obedience to Jesus (cf. Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4-5, 8), received the promise of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost and began fellowshiping together as Christians (Acts 2). According to Kahl (2022), the Jewish festival of Pentecost, celebrated in fifty days after the Passover, saw many migrants coming to Jerusalem for the festivities. Consequently, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit was witnessed by many people from all parts of the then-known world. The baptism of the Holy Spirit with the outward evidence of speaking in tongues and praising God in various languages gave rise to the "first transnational and intercultural" gathering of Jewish faithful (Acts 2:7-8, 11-12; Kahl 2022, p. 22).

The early church maintained teaching, fellowship, prayer and communal meal and communal ownership of wealth (Acts 2:42ff). The power of God was manifested in their operations evident in the healing of the cripple by Peter (Acts 3). This powerful deed resulted in the summoning of Peter and John before the Sanhedrin (Acts 4). Later, various healing ministrations by the apostles attracted persecutions (in the form of arrest) by the high priest and his associates (Acts 5:17ff). As the church expanded a conflict erupted between the Hellenistic Jews (the Jews whose origin was as a result of migration) and the Hebrew Jews among the members of the first transnational, early church. In this account the Hellenistic Jews complained of their widows being neglected or not catered for (Acts 6:1-6). To address the issue the apostles appointed seven people to take care of the distribution of food among the widows in the church. One of such persons was Stephen who later suffered martyrdom. The miraculous deeds that Stephen did in the name of Jesus led to his arrest and accusation that he was blaspheming against Moses and God (6:8ff). When questioned by the Sanhedrin about the accusation, Stephen gave a sermon that summarizes God's dealings with the Patriarch's and their descendants during the series of migrations that the progenitors (Patriarchs) embarked on (Stenschke 2016). The ensuing events after Stephen's assassination was the persecution of Christians or the church throughout Judea and Samaria (Stenschke 2016).

Acts 8 has three main sections; namely, Saul's role in the great persecution of Christians (vv.1b-3), Philip's ministry in Samaria (vv. 4-25) and his ministry to the Ethiopian official (vv. 26-40) (Newman and Nida 1972). Acts 8:1-13 is a narrative that forms part of the section 8:1-12:24 which focuses on the proclamation of the gospel to the regions that surrounded Jerusalem (Kisau 2006, p.1339). This ministry to the neighboring communities was prompted by persecution that broke out in Jerusalem against Christians. The story of Acts 8:1-13 closely links up with chapter 6 and 7. First, it continues the subject of persecution which started in chapter 6. Second, it continues to give a narrative about the Saul who was introduced in chapter 7. Third, the two figures, Philip (chap. 8) and Stephen (chaps. 6—7) are closely connected, both belonging to the seven people who were chosen to distribute provisions to widow (cf. 6:5). The order of their names in 6:5 is the same as the order in which they are mentioned in 6:8—8:40.

In the immediate context, the opening section of Acts 8 (vv.1b-3) transitions the Stephen narrative into the narrative about Philip to the figure of Saul mentioned in 7:58 (Keener 2013, p. 564). Keener (2013, p. 565; see also Longenecker 1981, p.353) identifies three functions of Stephen's martyrdom in the expansion of the kingdom. First, his last speech provided a theological model that could be used in the Diaspora. Second, his message led to a new persecution programme that resulted in the scattering of the gospel and establishment of new churches. Third, his message served as theological seed in Saul who later got converted and became an apostle for Christ (9:4-8). These effects validate Gamaliel's assertion that no human attempt can forever suppress a movement that comes from God (5:39;

cf. 28:31). The theological message of Acts 8:1-13 falls under Luke's theme of persecution in the context of proclamation (Keener 2013, p.565). Stephen's approach of placing the proclamation of the gospel above his life (7:51–60) is vindicated by God as he uses the persecution of the church to spread the gospel. The pericope under consideration (Acts 8:1-13) stresses that the martyrdom of Stephen marked the beginning of what the fate of many believers would be—that is, to be persecuted for the sake of the gospel. The chapter focuses on the ministry of the evangelist Philip who was one of the Hellenists who were forced to leave Jerusalem because of the persecution of the Jerusalem church.

Following Philip's ministry in Samaria (8:1-13) and the subsequent visit by Peter and John (8:14-25) is Philip's encounter with the Ethiopian eunuch (8:26-40). Philip met, evangelized and eventually baptized the finance minister of Ethiopia on the Wilderness Road to Gaza. The Ethiopian had come to Jerusalem for religious activities and was now returning to what is modern-day Sudan (8:26–40) (Stenschke 2016). Philip went on preaching the gospel in all the "Gentile Hellenistic areas of the coastal plain" until he reached Caesarea (8:40; Dillon 2011, p.742). The Ethiopian official became one of the early preachers in Africa. Philip's mission, therefore, had an indirect effect on the evangelization of Africa.

With the above contextual analysis, the paper continues to have a close reading of the text.

Close Reading of Acts 8:1-13

The Great Persecution in Jerusalem (8:1b-3)

The opening expression "On that day" (v. 1) implies that the execution of Stephen became the signal for an immediate programme against the church in Jerusalem (Toussaint 1983, p.371). One may infer from the wider context that it was the Greek-speaking Jews (of which Stephen was the leader) were the key target of the persecution and in most cases, they were the people who were forced to migrate from Jerusalem to other places (Bruce 1988; Toussaint 1983; Longenecker 1981; Kisau 2006). The Greek-speaking Jews could have been identified easily and would have been linked to Stephen. The migration of the Hellenists might have also been motivated by their perception that Jerusalem was bound for destruction because of her rejection of Stephen and so it was prudent for them to move to other places for safety (Bruce 1988). In other words, Jerusalem was considered as a candidate for destruction because of her rejection of Jesus as her Messiah.

The great persecution against the Jerusalem church was spearheaded by Saul of Tarsus (v.3). Contrary to the godly men who buried Stephen and mourn deeply for him (indicative of the Greek particle *de*, "but"), "Saul began to destroy the church" (v. 3). Since the Greek word for "destroy" is in the imperfect tense, it can also be taken in the sense of a past continuous action 9;"was destroying" (Newman and Nida 1972). It was this Saul that gave approval of the execution of Stephen (1:1a). In that event, he is portrayed an onlooker at whose feet the cloths of the executioners were placed (7:58), something that could probably allude to his authority (4:35, 37; 5:1); now he quickly emerges as the arch-persecutor (8:3). His action was legal because he sought legal backing from the chief-priestly leaders of the Sanhedrin (Bruce 1988). The historicity of this event is supported by Paul's own mention of his participation in violent persecution of the believers (1 Cor. 15:9; Gal. 1:13; Phil. 3:6; cf. 1 Tim. 1:13). He ironically boasts of it in terms of zealousness (Gal. 1:13, 23; Phil. 3:6) but also admits that in light of the truth it was a shameful act (1 Cor. 15:9). He was zealous to advance Judaism and protect it from any religious competition. He loved the law and was zealous about the traditions of his forebears.

The word “destroyed” (Gk. *elymaineto*, occurring only here in the New Testament) occurs in the LXX in Psalm 79:14 in the account of the wild boars that “destroy” (or “ravage”) a vineyard. The use of this word in describing Saul’s action against the church which highlights the seriousness of his attack against the church. Saul’s commitment to persecution of believers “was as if he were wildly raging against them” (cf. Acts 9:1, 13)” (Toussaint 1983, p. 372). Saul himself says that he “tried to destroy” the church (Gal. 1:13). Here, he uses a military terminology (Gk. *portheo*, meaning “to destroy”, “to harass”, “to ravage”, “to storm”, “torture”, “military devastation” or “outrages”) which denotes the destruction of a besieged city (cf. Acts 9:21) (Bruce 1988, p.163; Keener 2013, p.583).

The Jews understood persecution, having suffered in the hands of the Ptolemies, Seleucids, and Romans. Having experienced harsh persecutions before this time, one would expect the Jews to abolish the practice for everyone. It is therefore, unfortunate that the Jews are now using their power to persecute Christians. The seriousness and thoroughness of Saul’s attack is also indicated by the fact that he moved from house to house, combing every nook and cranny, persecuting all believers indiscriminately—both men and women. The violent nature of the attack is indicative of the use of the word “drag” (Gk. *suron*) (Newman and Nida 1972). He not only dragged them out of the house but also beat and imprisoned them (cf. 8:3; 9:29; 22:4-5; 22:19; 26:11), causing great havoc in Jerusalem (cf. 9:21). Paul was not the only persecutor of the early church; he also notes persecution by other Judeans that continued after his own involvement ceased (1 Thess. 2:14–16; cf. 2 Cor. 11:24, 26). His action of throwing believers into prison makes him assume the position of a prosecutor as well (Newman and Nida 1972). The persecution led to the movement of the disciples to other parts of the world as refugees. The next section considers this issue.

The Great Dispersion (1:1b, 4)

The great dispersion that occurred due to persecution is recorded in verses 1b and 4. The fact that all (Gk. *pantes*) the disciples, with the exception of the apostles, left Jerusalem and got “scattered throughout Judea and Samaria” (8:1b). The Greek word “*diesparesan*” (translated “scattered”) derives from *speiro*, which refers to the act of sowing seeds (cf. Matt. 6:26; 13:3-4, 18; 25:24, 26; Luke 8:5; 12:24). It underscores that the disciples got scattered in all directions. The apostles might have refused to leave Jerusalem because they considered themselves as having the primary responsibility to ensure the survival of the Jerusalem church (Bruce 1988; Longenecker 1981). Luke’s use of “*diesparesan*” draws on the Old Testament dispersion motif, though with remarkable changes here. Unlike the Old Testament dispersion which represented God judgment through deportation and exile because of the failure of Israel to fulfill their covenant responsibility, dispersion in the present circumstance serves as means by which migrants could demonstrate their obedience to God by fulfilling their part in the Great Commission (Stenschke 2016). Persecution was the cause of the first move of the gospel beyond the boundaries of Jerusalem (Acts 8:1, 3). Thus, the first Christian missionaries were migrants who had stayed in Jerusalem for some time and who now left the city as refugees.

The migration of the disciples from Jerusalem due to persecution facilitated the fulfillment of the mandate given in 1:8. The next section considers how Philip ministry that validates this claim.

Philip as Refugee and Missionary (vv. 5-8)

The evangelist Philip

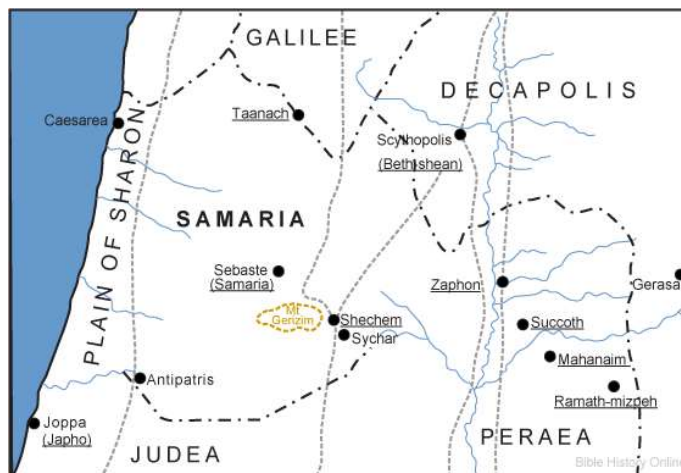
Stephen’s martyrdom and Saul’s persecution programme led to the scattering of the disciples who sprinkled the seed of the gospel along their routes and in the areas they settled. As Keener (2013, p.584) puts it, “Scattering from Jerusalem as a result of Stephen’s persecution proved a major factor in spreading

the Jesus movement.” The dispersion of the disciples could therefore be seen as the propagation of the church. Among the disciples who migrated from Jerusalem for safety was Philip (v. 5) whose ministry is in focus this chapter. The rest of Acts 8 accounts for Philip’s ministry in Samaria and to the Ethiopian finance minister, depicting how the church advanced after the expulsion of Hellenistic believers from Jerusalem. Evangelist Philip was a disciple from Caesera Maritima (Acts 21:8), and one of the seven Hellenists who were chosen to keep the communal fund. After persecution drove Philip from his work in Jerusalem, he went north of Samaria and preached to the Samaritans. Philip’s movement to Samaria was the beginning of the fulfilment of the second stage of Jesus’ programmatic statement in Acts 1:8.

Geographical and Political Background of Samaria

The text does not name the actual city of Samaria where Philip evangelized. Translators find it difficult determining whether Luke is saying “a city of Samaria” or “the city of Samaria.” However, it is clear that Philip’s audience were Samaritans. The identification of the mission field as “a city” or “the city”, according to Squires (2003, p.1231), suggests that Philip’s mission was urban-based, similar to the pattern followed by the other missionary leaders in Acts. This does not mean that the villages were left out in the missionary enterprise. Rather, it means that the missionary strategy was to begin from the city and spread the news to the villages. Given that people from villages occasionally move to the city for economic and other purposes, it stands to reason that the urban-based mission converted some rural settlers who visited the city during the period of the mission.

Samaria was located in the central hill country of Israel/Palestine, North of Judah/Judea and South of the Galilee (Just 2022). The name Samaria derives from the Hebrew word *someron* (Gk. *samaria*). In its appearance in 1 Kings 16:24, “Samaria” was a city. The city of Samaria was established as the capital of the Northern Kingdom of Israel (Kisau 2006). However, it later became the designation of the whole region surrounding it (cf. 2 Kings 17:24). The city of Samaria was renamed *Sebaste* in the later Roman period (Dell’Acqua 2022). Some of the important cities in the Samaria region include the following. Shechem is the oldest in this region (ca. 2000 BC); it was destroyed in 67 AD. Sychar was a small town near Jacob’s Well (John 4:5). Mount Gerizim was the highest mountain in the region of Samaria (cf. Deut. 11:29; 27:12; Josh. 8:33; Judg. 9:7). The map of first-century Samaria is shown below (Just 2022).



There was a long-standing animosity between the Judeans and the Samaritans which could be traced to Judah’s isolation from the other Israelite tribes in the settlement period (cf. Deut. 33:7) (Bruce 1988; Longenecker 1981). This division contributed to the disruption of the Hebrew kingdom after the death of Solomon in which the Ten Tribes separated themselves from Jerusalem, Judah and Benjamin.

The cleavage took a racial dimension when Sargon destroyed Samaria (in 722 BCE) and the Assyrian policy of deportation and mixing of population resulted in intermarriages between the Ten Tribes and foreigners. Reconciliatory attempts in the post-exilic period were unfruitful and the Samaritans' refusal to contribute to the rebuilding of the Jerusalem temple, their construction of a schismatic temple on Mount Gerizim and their alliance with the Seleucids to fight the Jews (in 167-164 BCE) show the seriousness of the cleavage (Bruce 1988; Longenecker 1981). Later (in 127 BCE), the schismatic temple put up by the Samaritans was destroyed by John Hyrcanus (Longenecker 1981). The intensity of the schism is also shown in the Samaritans' rejection of Herod's offer to rebuild the temple on Mount Gerizim on the basis that Herod had also decided to rebuild the Jerusalem temple. Later, in the Hasmonean period, Samaria came under Judean rule and later got liberated when Rome conquered Palestine in 63 BCE (Bruce 1988). However, the two groups continued to have unfriendly relations (cf. John 4).

Samaritan religion was rooted in the general tenets of early Judaism before 70 BCE and they were seen by Gentiles as a sect within Judaism (Keener 2013). According to Josephus (cited in Keener 2013), Samaritans identified themselves as Jews in times of Jewish prosperity but dissociated themselves from the Jews when things were tough for them (the Jews). They worshiped YHWH, the God of Israel, and shared almost the same Pentateuch with the Jews. In a much later period, they had their own high priests and synagogues. Jewish rabbis were divided over the identity of the Samaritans; some of them considered the Samaritans as Gentiles while other considered them as impure Jews (Keener 2013). Along the line, Gentile settlement in Samaria (esp. in Sebaste) led to the introduction of paganism into Samaritan religion, making the Jews consider them as outcasts (Kisau 2006, p.1339). Most Jewish texts portray them "not as theological heretics or moral sinners but as schismatics defining their own social group as against Judaism" (Keener 2013, p.590). Despite Jewish disclaimer, the Samaritans were not Gentiles in the strict sense of the word. Therefore, Philip's mission in Samaria was not yet fully the "Gentile mission" but a transition toward it (cf. Acts 1:8). The Samaritans in Christian mission is significant for the restoration of Israel.

The Great Conversion of the City

Given the above background data on Samaria, one wonders why Philip would choose Samaria as his mission field. Nonetheless there were advantages for him in Samaria. First, the Samaritans shared with the Jews the hope of a coming deliverer like Moses (cf. Deut. 18:15-19); however, they (the Samaritans) later perceived the deliverer as a "restorer" (Bruce 1988, p.164). The messianic hope would have served as a foundation for Philip's presentation of the gospel. Longenecker (1981, p.355) notes another factors that might have made Samaria a fertile ground for the sowing of the gospel seed: "Doubtless a feeling of kinship was established the formerly dispossessed Samaritans and the recently dispossessed Christian Hellenists because of Stephen's opposition to the mentality of mainstream Judaism and its veneration of the Jerusalem temple—an opposition that would have facilitated a favorable response to Philip and his message in Samaria." A key to a successful mission among the Samaritans was to overthrow the centrality of the Jerusalem temple in the religious faith. The Christian gospel which embraces all and transcends racial barrier was more suitable for such an environment.

Philip went to Samaria and preached the gospel. The expression "preaching the word" (in v. 4) links well with verse 25 which concludes the section with the story of Peter and John also proclaiming the word. Luke's use of their literary style is meant to underline not only the close link between the dispersion of the disciples and the proclamation of gospel but also the unity in mission between the disperse Hellenists and the apostles (Dillon 2011). Philip's ministry was consistent with the ministry of Jesus and the apostles. In terms of the content of the message, "The Messiah" he preached (8:5) was a message that had already been announced in Jerusalem (2:36; 3:20; 5:42). This message might have included all or part of the following seven thematic areas: "The sinfulness of humanity and the need for

repentance, prophecies about the coming Messiah, the miracles and teaching of Jesus, the Christ, the atoning sacrifice of Jesus on the cross of Calvary, Jesus' physical resurrection, the sending of the Holy Spirit, and the promise of the Parousia" (Boaheng 2020, p.20). Philip might have tailored his message to address the socio-religious context of his audience.

Philip's preaching ministry was confirmed by miraculous signs (Gk. *semeia*; cf. vv. 6, 13) which drew people's attention to his message. The miraculous deeds that accompanied the proclamation were meant to authenticate the message/faith proclaimed (cf. Mark 16:20). This was consistent with the apostles' ministry (2:43; 4:30; 5:12). He cast out demonic spirits (8:7), as did Peter (5:16) and Jesus (Luke 4:33-37; 7:21; 9:37-43); healed the paralyzed and lame (8:7), so did Peter (3:1-10, a lame man; 9:32-35; a paralyzed man) and Jesus (Luke 5:18, a paralyzed man; 7:22, the lame). More so, the joy that Philip's ministry brought to the inhabitants of the city. Luke summarizes the response of the Samaritans saying, "So there was great joy in that city" (8:8, NIV). In the book of Acts, this is the only account where "seemingly a whole city accepts the Gospel" (Stenschke 2016, p.137). The joy that accompanies salvation has been a core part of the Christian experience since the early days of the church. The emotional response by Philip's audience was consistent with the emotional experiences of the Jerusalemites due to the ministry of the apostles (3:11; 4:21). The obvious conclusion is that God guided Philip in Samaria just as he guided the apostles in Jerusalem (Squires 2003, p.1231).

This sense of God's power in Philip ministry is strengthened in the ensuing account of Simon's conversion (vv. 9-13). There was a sorcerer in the city named Simon whose magical powers amazed the people in the city (v. 9-11). He was considered as a powerful person because of his magical prowess. The force of the Greek text indicates that he was still practicing magic when Philip went to Samaria (Newman and Nida 1972). Magic was a common religion in the first-century Greco-Roman world (Squires 2003). This magician (sorcerer) had for a long time been the source of religious knowledge and practice for the people (v. 11). The magician was a miracle worker and a powerful person (Newman and Nida 1972). All people in the city (eminent and ordinary alike) paid attention to him and hailed him as a great person (Newman and Nida 1972). Simon's claim to be "the Great power of God" (v. 10 NIV) might have drawn from some popular Hellenistic religious motifs (Keener 2013, p.589). He was like the community witchdoctor or diviner. The expression "Great power of God" seems to suggest that Simon claimed to be the Most High God (Newman and Nida 1972).

Simon has been identified in at least three ways: First, he is the originator of the Gnostic heresies; second, he went to Rome and twisted the Christian faith; third, he lost to Peter in a miracle contest (Toussaint 1983; Dillon 2011; Squires 2003). Whatever one's view, the fact remains that his anti-Christian activity (sorcery) is the focus in the present text. According to Unger (2011, p.153) a sorcerer is a person "who practices magic by using occult formulas, incantations, and mystic mutterings." Such a person exercises control over nature and people by use of demonic power. In the biblical context, sorcery and magic fall under witchcraft activities (Boaheng 2023). Such a power usually serves to obstruct the expansion of the kingdom of God. Without conquering opposing powers, people finding it difficult to accept the sovereignty of God.

The encounter between Philip and Simon was, therefore, an opportunity to demonstrate to the Samaritans that Christ whose name is proclaimed is incomparable and infinitely exceeds the supposed power of the demons behind Simon's ministrations. God's victory in this religious clash apparently resulted in massive conversion in the city. There are some striking similarities and differences between the two personalities. First, both of them performed miracles; Simon by the power of demons and Philip by the power of God. Second, Simon boasted and claimed glory for himself, but Philip preached Christ and gave glory to him. Third, people were amazed at Simon's sorcery but people were converted by

Philip's message. Luke, therefore, apologetically dissociates the Christian movement from demonic activities like magic and sorcery.

The power that accompanied Phillip's proclamation and the content of his message led to the conversion of Simon: "Simon himself believed and was baptized" (v. 13). His magical power was conquered by the power of the gospel. It goes without saying that the power that Simon used for his religious activities was different from the power that energized the apostles (3:12-13; 4:7-10) and Jesus (2:22; Luke 5:17). The conversion of such great power as Simon shows the extent of Philip's success in the mission field. Converting and following Philip, Simon provided a great motivation for the people to abandon their former ways and embrace the message of Christ. In bringing Simon to the point of baptism (v.13), Philip acts fulfils the aspect of the Great Commission that requires converts to be baptized. He baptized the people who responded to the gospel call (v.12), paralleling the baptisms that had taken place earlier in Jerusalem (2:41). "Baptism is an act of Christian initiation in which water is applied" (Erickson 2001, p.20), after which comes intentional discipleship that will ensure the maturity of the convert.

But Simon himself, judging by the narrative that follows (vv. 14-23), was more interested in the power deeds that was manifested through Philip's ministry than the reign of God in his life or the propagation of the gospel message. His conversion seems to be false and like the one described in John 2:23-25 (cf. 4:18), "belief" based only on miraculous deeds and hence inferior to true commitment to Christ. Simon's "belief" could have been that of the demons in James 2:19, intellectual faith with no experience of true salvation. Yet, one cannot be dogmatic about this point because only God knows those who are truly saved (2 Tim 2:19). Phillip's ministry also highlights the role of the Holy Spirit in Christian mission (cf. 1:4-5).

Many African communities have a wealth of legends that illustrate how conversion from traditional religions might be facilitated by supernatural acts that result from a spiritual test or competition. In religious conflicts, the losers typically change to the faith of the winner, as do their supporters. Achebe (1994) describes how Nigerians offered demonic forests to Western missionaries to have the missionaries struck dead when they entered the forest in *Things Fall Apart*. The missionaries gratefully accepted "the battlefield" and entered the country to carry up their missionary duties without being aware of the plot. The natives believed the missionaries would perish within a few days based on their understanding of how perilous the terrible woodland was. The indigenous people eventually accepted the God whose message the missionaries had preached after discovering that the missionaries were immune to the evil forces because they had survived after entering the evil forest. As a result, "shortly thereafter, he won his first three converts" (Achebe 1994, p.149).

The tale of the Fante shrine of *Nananom Mpɔw* ("the groove of the ancestors") is how Ghanaians interpret this Nigerian event. Oburumankoma, Odapagyan, and Oson's mortal bones were interred in *Nananom Mpɔw*, a revered location. It was a potent shrine in ancient Fante where traditional priests interceded on behalf of ancestors and supernatural forces (Essamuah 2003). A religious "battle" that broke out between early Fante Methodists and the priests of *Nananom Mpɔw* put this shrine's might to the test. One of the Christians cut down a tree in the grove, which was against the rules, which led to the confrontation. Ultimately, the Christians prevailed, which was understood to prove that the Christian God was more potent than any native divinity (Essamuah 2003).

Theological/Musicological Reflections

1. African in the Diaspora and Christian missions

The study has shown that migration is one of God's ways of expanding his kingdom. As mentioned earlier, the origin of global mission or the first attempt to take Christianity outside the confines of Jerusalem was due to persecution-induced migration. Christian mission was fertilized and universalized by persecutions. The account shows that migration and mission go hand in hand. Today, there are a lot of Africans who for economic and other reasons move to other parts of the world (especially Europe and North America).

The migration should serve as an opportunity to evangelize societies that hitherto have been closed to the traditional mission endeavors of the church. Adogame (2013) asserts that "population mobility serves as a viable instrument of religious and cultural expansion, transmission, and renegotiation". According to Adogame (2013), the resultant product of missions of the Africans in the diaspora is the African Churches Mission (ACM) and this product was well established in the early twentieth century in 1931 by a Nigerian-born Daniels Ekarte in Toxteth which in the slums of Liverpool (Adogame 2013). Adogame (2013) goes on to explain that Ekarte labored as a missionary in a region where many Africans were sold into slavery and others were out of work by fervently evangelizing through open-air crusades and visiting people's homes until he was able to establish a permanent and thriving church. As Philip's ministry changed people's lives through his healing miracles, Ekarte changed people's lives through his humanitarian efforts, his vociferous criticism of racial discrimination, and his work rehabilitating single mothers.

From the foregoing, one realizes that migration can provide an opportunity for evangelization in societies that were previously resistant to traditional missionary efforts. This perspective challenges the conventional view of missionary work primarily occurring through organized church missions. It suggests that individuals or groups of people who migrate to new regions may inadvertently or intentionally become agents of cultural and religious exchange. This can lead to the establishment of new religious communities. Africans in the diaspora are, there, motivated to explore their new environment to establish and utilize means by which they can fulfill the Great Commission of making disciples of all nations. They may seek support from established churches (in Africa or in the diaspora) when the need arises. However, they are encouraged to work toward being self-sufficient in this missionary endeavor.

2. Migration, Socio-Economic Consequences and Mission

The socio-cultural and economic consequences of migration need mention at this point. Whenever people migrate their economic activities and status are affected. Philip and other followers of Christ who migrated from Jerusalem to other places might have experienced different levels of these consequences. Leaving relatives, friends and other companions behind and moving into a new environment leads to alienation which in turn has serious consequences on one's well-being. More often than not migrants find it difficult embracing the culture of their new community (Asante 2021). They normally continue to hold on to their original culture and find it difficult adjusting to the new environment. The phenomenon of alienation sets in when the person in the new environment decides to develop their own way of life independent of what prevails in the destination society. The economic consequence of migration sets in when the migrant is not able to undertake the economic venture they used to undertake. In the case of the current scenario, the dispersion would have had serious socio-economic consequences for those who had economic properties in Jerusalem (Keener 2013). The communal ownership of wealth in the early church was a key means for the survival of many of the believers. Moving into a new environment deprived them of their source of survival. The dispersion made would have made it difficult for the needy to receive assistance from their wealthy brethren. The

persecution might have also led to the loss of properties belonging to some of the Judeans and this might have increased the Judean church's poverty (Acts 11:28–29; Rom. 15:26–27).

The religious consequences have to do with the migrants encounter with new religious tradition. Many people find it difficult maintaining their religious faith when they move into a new environment. Imagine a first-century Christian moving into a society that is dominated by people described as pagans, for instance. The person may struggle to maintain his or her faith in Christ. In the case of the dispersed Christians, they may be tempted to be silent about their faith in order to avoid further persecution from their new neighbors. But Luke's account indicates that the dispersed believers did not stop proclaiming the gospel even though they knew that they could be martyred just as Stephen was martyred. Therefore, their migration from Jerusalem "was practical, not cowardly (cf. Acts 9:24–25; 14:6; 20:3; Luke 21:21)" (Keener 2013, p.586).

Religious alienation occurs when the migrant finds it difficult making sense of their religion in their new environment. The story of the Israelites who found it difficult to sing the Lord's song in a foreign land (Psalm 137:4) serves as a good example of how migration can affect people's religious life. A common reaction to the effect of migration on people's religious lives is to find people of their faith and find a common way of worship. In the contemporary world, the emergence of African-dominated churches in Europe and North America may serve as a good example for this scenario. This normally happens when, for example, a group of Ghanaians living in Europe decide to come together to worship in a way that is similar to the practice in their home country. As the account shows, Philip maintained his faith and spread it in his new environment. The rest of Acts 8 shows strongly that migrants have a great potential for mission.

Learning from the works of the early Christians, Africans in the Diaspora are urged to see their new environment as missionary field that needs to be explored. They must endeavor to find time to share their faith with others. In the 21st century where Africa has become the heartbeat of global Christianity, the global church counts on the efforts of Africans in the Diaspora to lead the agenda for the revival of the churches in such areas as Europe and North America.

The Roman Catholic Church, under the direction of Father Morin, was the driving force behind the European missions in Ghana, especially in Northern Ghana (Diboro 2020). Aside from the gospel's spread, which led to many natives becoming Christians, the Europeans' contributions to education, health care, trade, and other areas of life had a profound impact on the lives of the people (Diboro 2020). The healings and other miracles that were carried out as a result of Philip's missionary activity can be compared to the impact that the European missionaries had. Both Philip in the biblical text and European missions in Ghana propagated the gospel, but in both cases, people's lives were also changed—in the case of Philip, by miracles; in the case of Ghanaian missions, through education, health care facilities, and other things.

3. The Holy Spirit and Mission

The role of the Holy Spirit in Christian missions cannot be overemphasized. Jesus's prophecy about the Spirit's empowerment of the disciples (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4, 8) was fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2). On this Day, the Spirit initiated the birth of the Church and bestowed upon her the responsibility to proclaim the Kingdom of God in the world. The expansion of the church and the call of Philip into ministry were all part of the work of the Holy Spirit. That Philip was a spirit-filled believer is evident in the fact that he was one of the seven persons who were appointed to distribute food to widows based on him being full of the Holy Spirit and having wisdom (Acts 6:3). From the discussions made so far, the roles of the Holy Spirit in Christian mission can be seen in the following areas. First, the Holy

Spirit calls, empowers and sends people into the world to preach the gospel. When he sends, he prepares grounds for people to accept the gospel by convicting them of sin through the power of the gospel. Jesus said that the Spirit “will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment” (John 16:8 NIV). The Spirit not only convicts the world of sin but also mandates the “Church to confront sin in the world” (Alva 2015, p.141).

Second, it is the Holy Spirit who regenerates. The Holy Spirit regenerated the Samaritans and gave them new life in Christ. The Christian missionary does not regenerate; he/she only preaches and the Holy Spirit does his work of conviction and regeneration (Alva 2015). This means that whether people will accept the gospel or not depends solely on the Holy Spirit. The human missionary who preaches the gospel simply provides a conducive for regeneration to be effected.

Third, Holy Spirit empowers Christians to perform miracles. From the passage we have studied, the Holy Spirit empowered Philip to perform signs and miracles, which captivate the attention of the people. This empowerment demonstrates the Holy Spirit's role in equipping and enabling individuals for effective mission work. The signs and wonders serve as a powerful testimony to the truth of the gospel (cf. Mark 16:20) and draw people to faith in Christ. Sign and wonders are, therefore, not to be used to glorify the human agent through whom the Spirit is working. They are not also expected to be seen as ends in themselves but as means to win people for Christ.

Conclusion

In the study, it was found that the first move of the gospel beyond the boundaries of Jerusalem was due to persecution. The first Christian missionaries were migrants who had stayed in Jerusalem for some time and who now left the city as refugees. Instead of seeing the conditions in their new environment as a threat to their existence, they saw it as an opportunity to expand the kingdom of God. The outcome of the persecution underscores God's sovereign activity even in the context of opposition, Saul becomes God's instrument for expanding the kingdom even when he undertakes his evil activity of kicking against the goads. The persecution was providential, in that it fulfilled God's purpose of drawing the Gentiles to himself. This implies that there is opportunity in the midst of challenges. Christians must search for such opportunities and utilize them rather than allowing the challenges to weigh them down. Finally, given the Holy Spirit's role as the principal animator and sustainer of all the missionary work, it is important for every Church to take the subject of pneumatology seriously. The Church needs to position herself to be in tune with the Spirit. Without the Spirit the church has no life.

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